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ABSTRACT

The Erikson Psychosocial Inventory (EPSI) (Rosenthal, Gurney, and Moore, 1981) was introduced into a longitudinal study of 234 previously studied inner-city children as they were scheduled to make the transition from elementary to junior high school. Compared to the EPSI original Australian sample, inner-city African American 12- and 13-year-olds rated themselves significantly higher in initiative and identity but lower in intimacy. Although no overall sex differences were found, poverty had an especially negative impact on psychosocial development of males. No significant differences were found between grade levels or type of school students attended. While retention had a negative effect on psychosocial development, placement in special education had minimal impact. However, it is difficult to determine whether generally lower psychosocial development among those who have been retained prior to early adolescence is a cause or consequence of retention. There were early indicators of difficulty in adaptive development among retained children. Introducing the EPSI earlier in future longitudinal studies would be helpful in answering this question. (Contains four tables and nine references.) (Author/SLD)

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Influences on Psychosocial Development of Inner-City Early Adolescents

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Poster presented at the biennial meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development, April 3-6, 1997, Washington, D. C. Address inquiries to the author at the University of North Florida, Department of Psychology, Jacksonville, FL 32224.

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Abstract

The Erikson Psychosocial Stage Inventory (EPSI) was introduced into a longitudinal study of 234 previously studied inner-city children as they were scheduled to make the transition from elementary to junior high school. Compared to the EPSI original Australian sample, inner-city African American 12- and 13-year-olds rated themselves significantly higher in initiative and identity but lower in intimacy. Although no overall sex differences were found, poverty had an especially negative impact on psychosocial development of males. No significant differences were found between grade levels or type of school students attended. While retention had a negative affect on psychosocial development, placement in special education had minimal impact. However, it is difficult to determine whether generally lower psychosocial development among those who have been retained prior to early adolescence is a cause or consequence of retention. There were early indicators of difficulty in adaptive development among retained children. Introducing the EPSI earlier in future longitudinal studies would be helpful in answering this question.

Influences on Psychosocial Development of Inner-City Early Adolescents

The Erikson Psychosocial Stage Inventory (EPSI) developed by Rosenthal, Gurney, and Moore (1981) and modified by Darling-Fisher and Leidy (1988; MEPSI) appears to be a useful instrument for operationalizing and testing psychosocial development. Because resolution of core conflicts of earlier developmental stages can influence crises of a later developmental period (Erikson, 1950), Rosenthal et al. (1981) believed significantly higher adjustment scores of older students result from having had more time to work through each crises. Some evidence suggests that older adolescents are indeed more successful in resolving psychosocial tasks compared to younger adolescents (Arehart & Smith, 1990). Gender differences in psychosocial development similar to those suggested by Gilligan (1982) and Peck (1986) have also been identified by the EPSI/MEPSI. Adolescent Australian males scored higher on autonomy and initiative, while females scored higher on intimacy (Rosenthal et al., 1981). Darling-Fisher (1987) found a similar autonomy/intimacy difference in young American parents of infants. More recently, Leidy and Darling-Fisher (1995) suspected cohort and cultural effects in gender-related psychosocial differences, suggesting a need for further assessment of different ethnic and cultural groups and various time periods.

The current study introduced the EPSI into a longitudinal study of previously studied inner-city children as they were scheduled to make the transition from elementary to junior high school. Of particular interest were a) comparison of psychosocial development across cultures, b) influence of poverty, c) identification of possible sex

differences in this cohort, and d) impact of educational placements (i.e., grade retention, special education) as potentially major life events in psychosocial development of early adolescents.

Method

A sample of 234 children (M age = 149.3 months) from two cohorts (Classes of 2000 and 2001) currently enrolled in 82 different public schools in Washington, D.C., (an urban school district) completed the 72-item, 5-point Likert scale EPSI. The sample was 98% African American and 52% female. Most children (77%) qualified for subsidized lunch based upon low family income, and 63% lived in single parent homes. Most children had attended both pre-kindergarten and kindergarten (Pre-K), with the remaining 18% entering school for the first time as kindergartners (K-only). Although these cohorts should have been in either the sixth or seventh grade, 36% had been previously retained (a rate characteristic of this urban system) and 14% were receiving special education services.

Australian colloquialisms in the original EPSI were replaced with more typical American expressions. The measure still included 12 statements (6 positive, 6 negative resolutions) for each of Erikson's first six psychosocial crises (Trust, Autonomy, Initiative, Industry, Identity, Intimacy). High scores indicated positive resolution of a psychosocial crisis. The EPSI was individually administered (outside the classroom) by minority college interns working in the school district's secondary unit.

Results

As shown in Table 1, this younger, ethnic sample of American adolescents differed somewhat from Australian youth. Inner-city African American 12- and 13-year-olds rated themselves significantly higher in initiative and identity, but lower in intimacy. Effect sizes were moderate.

Insert Tables 1 and 2 about here

Poverty had a negative impact on psychosocial development (see Table 2). Adolescents who qualified for subsidized lunch rated themselves significantly lower in autonomy, initiative, industry, and identity. Their aggregate EPSI score was also significantly lower than adolescents living in more economically advantaged families. Poverty-related effect sizes were moderate. While no overall sex differences were found, a 'sex by poverty' interaction was evident. Poverty had an especially negative impact on the psychosocial development of boys (aggregate EPSI: $F(1, 228) = 5.56, p < .01$), possibly through its link with school failure. Both males [$\chi^2(1) = 3.65, p < .05$] and low income children [$\chi^2(1) = 15.36, p < .001$] were more likely to be retained. Subsequent analyses used a covariate (eligibility for subsidized lunch) to control for the influence of poverty.

No significant differences in EPSI scores were found between grade levels or the type of school (elementary, middle, junior high) students attended. However, retention

did have a negative affect on psychosocial development. As shown in Table 3, students who had been retained prior to seventh grade were significantly lower in autonomy and industry, and also tended to be lower in identity, intimacy, and overall adjustment. Effect sizes were moderate. Unlike retention, placement in special education had minimal impact on psychosocial development. No sex or poverty-related differences were found, and only identity may have been negatively affected ($p < .08$) by special education placement.

Insert Table 3 about here

Further examination of retention found early indicators of social difficulties. During their first year in school, future retainees were rated by teachers as having significantly poorer work habits ($p < .01$) and lower overall adaptive behavior ($p < .01$). K-only children who would eventually be retained also had some academic difficulties ($p < .01$) during their first year in school. No 'sex by retention' interactions were found in early social or academic measures of either Pre-K or K-only children.

Table 4 shows an interesting contrast between Pre-K and K-only children. Compared to all other children, K-only females who had been retained rated themselves higher in resolution of all six crises, while their male counterparts rated themselves lower in all six areas. Significant 'sex by retention' interactions were found for trust, initiative, intimacy, and overall psychosocial adjustment.

Insert Table 4 about here

Discussion

Moderately higher levels of initiative and identity among African American inner-city adolescents most likely reflect cultural and/or ethnic differences between this study's sample and the EPSI's Australian sample. Lower levels of intimacy probably reflect age differences between the samples because 12- and 13-year-olds are not yet universally involved in forming intimate relationships. The surprising lack of sex differences in psychosocial development of these early adolescents could reflect the cohort and/or ethnic differences suspected by Leidy and Darling-Fisher (1995). Also, contrary to findings by Pickar and Tori (1986), special education adolescents in this sample did not show notably lower resolution of the psychosocial stages. In contrast, students who had failed a grade were having some difficulty. Failure had an especially negative impact on the psychosocial development of boys who had not attended preschool. However, it is difficult to determine whether generally lower psychosocial development among those who have been retained prior to early adolescence is a cause or consequence of retention. There were earlier indicators of difficulty in adaptive development among retained children. Introducing the EPSI earlier in future longitudinal studies would be helpful in answering this question.

Another finding needing further clarification is the sex difference in retention's impact on those who did not attend preschool. Why retention would enhance the development of K-only females and hinder that of K-only males is unclear. As a group, these K-only females did not differ economically from their male counterparts. The increased trust and intimacy reported by retained K-only females may be partially explained by Miller's relational theory (1991) of personality development. However, socialization does not fully account for noted differences because Pre-K females who had been retained do not show a corresponding increase in intimacy. Further studies using the EPSI/MEPSI with early adolescents in different cultures and time periods are warranted.

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Table 1
Comparison of EPSI Scores in an Australian and American Sample

	Australian (1981) [Grades 9 and 11] M	SD	*African American (1995)* [Grades 6 and 7] M	SD	t-test (*df* = 854)	*Effect Size*
Subscales						
Trust	3.40	(.55)	3.37	(.50)	.75	.05
Autonomy	3.66	(.50)	3.75	(.56)	- 1.28	- .18
Initiative	3.61	(.50)	3.76	(.57)	- 3.75 **	- .30
Industry	3.63	(.62)	3.63	(.59)	.00	.00
Identity	3.67	(.61)	3.84	(.59)	- 2.43 *	- .28
Intimacy	3.46	(.58)	3.33	(.42)	- 3.61 **	.22
Aggregate						
EPSI	3.57	(.56)	3.60	(.42)	- .83	- .05

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .001$

Table 2
Impact of Poverty and Sex on Psychosocial Development

	Lunch Status						*Sex*					
	No Subsidy M	SD	Subsidized M	SD	ANOVA *F* (1, 229)	*Effect Size*	Males M	SD	Females M	SD	ANOVA *F* (1, 229)	*Effect Size*
Subscales												
Trust	3.38	(.56)	3.36	(.48)	.10	.04	3.42	(.46)	3.32	(.53)	1.97	.22
Autonomy	3.94	(.58)	3.69	(.55)	8.30 **	.43	3.79	(.57)	3.72	(.56)	.87	.12
Initiative	3.97	(.56)	3.70	(.57)	9.79 **	.48	3.72	(.59)	3.80	(.57)	1.23	- .14
Industry	3.79	(.60)	3.59	(.58)	4.90 *	.33	3.62	(.61)	3.64	(.58)	.05	- .03
Identity	4.00	(.61)	3.78	(.58)	5.87 **	.36	3.86	(.62)	3.81	(.57)	.45	.08
Intimacy	3.40	(.41)	3.31	(.42)	1.95	.22	3.53	(.42)	3.31	(.42)	.62	.52
Aggregate												
EPSI	3.74	(.46)	3.55	(.41)	8.19 **	.41	3.62	(.44)	3.58	(.42)	.40	.09

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

Table 3
Impact of Retention Prior to Seventh Grade and Special Education on Psychosocial Development

	No Prior Retention M	SD	Prior Retention M	SD	ANCOVA *F* (1, 227)	*Effect Size*	Regular Education M	SD	Special Education M	SD	ANCOVA *F* (1, 227)	*Effect Size*
Subscales												
Trust	3.36	(.54)	3.38	(.42)	.60	- .04	3.38	(.50)	3.42	(.48)	.15	- .08
Autonomy	3.83	(.58)	3.62	(.53)	4.17 *	.36	3.76	(.56)	3.71	(.60)	.13	.09
Initiative	3.80	(.58)	3.69	(.58)	.44	.19	3.77	(.58)	3.78	(.60)	.05	- .02
Industry	3.72	(.60)	3.48	(.56)	6.31 **	.40	3.65	(.60)	3.52	(.67)	.94	.22
Identity	3.90	(.62)	3.71	(.54)	3.18 +	.31	3.85	(.58)	3.63	(.67)	3.13 +	.38
Intimacy	3.37	(.43)	3.26	(.40)	2.92 +	.26	3.33	(.41)	3.30	(.43)	.05	.07
Aggregate												
EPSI	3.65	(.45)	3.51	(.37)	3.13 +	.31	3.60	(.43)	3.56	(.48)	.13	.09

+ $p < .10$ * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

Table 4
Sex by Retention Interaction for Pre-K vs. K-Only Children

	Attended Pre-K					*Attended K-Only*				
	Males		Females		ANCOVA	Males		Females		ANCOVA
	OK	Failed	OK	Failed	*F* (1, 197)	OK	Failed	OK	Failed	*F* (1, 33)
Subscales										
Trust	3.38	3.40	3.32	3.41	.19	3.38	3.25	3.11	3.53	3.94 *
Autonomy	3.71	3.66	3.81	3.88	.50	3.42	3.32	3.45	3.96	3.77 +
Initiative	3.80	3.59	3.83	3.74	.52	3.80	3.49	3.53	4.05	5.96 *
Industry	3.60	3.45	3.73	3.77	1.21	3.54	3.27	3.40	3.76	2.38
Identity	3.66	3.75	3.88	3.93	.07	3.75	3.50	3.73	4.18	3.03 +
Intimacy	3.15	3.36	3.38	3.31	4.25 *	3.26	3.09	3.12	3.64	5.62 *
Aggregate										
EPSI	3.54	3.52	3.64	3.67	.08	3.48	3.28	3.40	3.86	7.43 **

+ $p < .10$ * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$